

ONLINE FOCUS GROUP FOR PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION:

Approximately 38 people participated in this interactive on-line dialogue facilitated by Louisa Koch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for OAR and member of the NOAA Diversity Council.

The following three related SFA questions were identified within the NOAA-wide least favorable ten:

- Q04: Your opportunity for advancement (very good to very poor);
- Q25: The NOAA process for considering employees for competitive promotion works well for me; and,
- Q26: The NOAA process for rating performance works well for me (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

NOAA developed the following questions to try and gather more information on these issues to assist in determining the best solutions/recommendations to improve these areas. Each question is followed by an analysis of the interactive dialogue.

ON-LINE DIALOGUE ANALYSIS AND SUGGESTIONS:

- 1. Employee advancement with NOAA is hindered most by (select up to two)? a. Current job/task assignments are not at a higher level; b. Inability/inflexibility to be detailed to a higher graded or more challenging position; c. Changing job classifications (moving to a new field) and applying for jobs in that field; d. Little to no exposure to higher management; e. Lack of accrual of higher level duties (more responsibility in current job); f. Not being recognized for doing higher level work activities; and, g. Other (please provide/describe specific areas).**

Over 90% of the employees answered:

- d. Little to no exposure to higher management
- f. Not being recognized for doing higher level work activities.
- g. Other:

Managerial addiction to power, employees are discouraged from seeking advancement. Older Employees, handicapped workers, minorities and women are at a disadvantage for promotions.

2. Do you feel you have to apply outside your organization to get a promotion?

Approximately 80% said that this question brought out the perception by the majority that most Line Office have a tendency to hire people they know and the candidate is pre-selected or they go completely outside of the agency and leave people from other Line Offices without any chances.

3. Do you feel that your supervisor is comfortable and doesn't want to promote you because he/she feels you will stay without a promotion?

Approximately 80% of the employees recognized that supervisors have FTE limitations and funding issues. The other 20% didn't know or did not have an opinion.

4. What are the most important/meaningful advancement opportunities NOAA employees expect/want to have? (i.e., training, temporary details, education, etc. List up to 4).

Training, temporary details, rotational assignments, education, pay equity.

5. Do you feel that there is a NOAA competitive promotion process? If "No", What changes would you make? Why?

More than 95 % of the employees would like to know what the NOAA competitive promotion process is. Some believe it's based on favoritism. Post on NOAA Web site.

6. Do you feel that NOAA employees are considered for competitive promotions over other candidates?

Over 80% answered yes because very often the competition for a job is not an open competition because there is already a candidate in mind.

7. How would you go about changing the corporate culture about not promoting from

within?

Again approximately 80% of the employees want to make sure that there is real open competition for promotions where the best candidate wins.

- 8. Have you ever been denied a promotion that you feel you deserved? Why do you think you were not promoted?**

Approximately 50% answered yes because on many occasions selections were made on the selectee's visibility to management rather than their qualifications.

- 9. Do you understand the flexibility and constraints of your line/staff office performance rating process?**

90% of the employees do not feel that they can get straight answers from their management. They would like the process explained to them and posted to a website.

- 10. Without regard to regulations and law, what changes would you recommend to the performance rating process?**

Approximately 95% of the employees listed:

To know more clearly the context of their ranking.

Create an appeal process independent of rating office.

Posting of scores/awards without names.

Mechanism to remove poor performers.

- 11. Without regard to regulations and law, what changes would you recommend for the competitive promotion process?**

50% of the employees felt strongly that employees not selected for promotion should be sent a letter with full explanation for non-selection which includes selectee's qualification factors, and suggestions for what the other candidate(s) can or should do to prepare for the next opportunity. The other 50% did not have an opinion or did not know enough about the process to comment.

- 12. Do you consider "advancement opportunity" synonymous to "a promotion"?**

Over 90% of the employees knew the distinction between the two.

13. Are supervisors/managers treated differently than non-supervisors/managers in regards to advancement and promotion opportunities in NOAA? If yes, how?

Approximately 70% of the employees felt that there appears to be a perception that supervisors/managers get preferential treatment for advancement and promotions. Other 30% did not have an opinion or did not know.

14. Do you feel that you are adequately compensated for your performance? If no, why?

About 50% of the employees felt that they work as hard or harder than another who receives bonuses more often or are recognized more often. Favoritism issue again.

15. What percent increase or bonus do you think is a fair compensation?

There was a consensus that any bonus would be welcomed, but approximately 70% said a bonus of \$500 or more, or a step increase would be significant. Also, time off could also be a compensation for a job well done.

16. What other suggestions or comments can you offer regarding NOAA's performance system and opportunities for advancement?

- NOAA should investigate "Old Boy Network" influence on promotions. **(L.O managements need to review promotion practices)**
 - Pay pool manager dictates all pay matters (not good system) **(Review of Demo Project)**
 - Include extracurricular activities in performance rating **(Explore Request)**
 - Make sure managers know about the variety of awards they can give **(Post on Web, discuss at management meetings, HR advise managers)**
 - Put useful links on a centralized web site in NOAA for information on pay, awards, training, etc. **(HR should take lead on this)**
 - Employees have a right to know how they rank compared to others, scores, bonuses, and salary increases (without names) should be published for all to see **(Explore with HR and GC)**
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- Make sure that training and other opportunities for advancement (temporary details, rotational assignments, etc.) are made a priority by management through equality in funding **(HR discussion with managers/supervisors)**

- Implement a Refresher Briefings on the Demo Project **(Should be done)**
- Manager training for managers/supervisors **(Should be mandatory)**
- An outside agency appears panel could provide checks and balances against managerial abuse and/or incompetence **(Explore this recommendation)**
- Multi-level performance rating system (rather than pass/fail), more concrete feedback **(Explore changing pass/fail system)**
- More objective grading criteria; strong management commitment to truly reward outstanding performers and remedy for poor performers **(Discussion with HR, GC, etc.)**
- Managers should attend leadership training programs regularly, bonuses are available only to managers who are current in their leadership training requirement. **(Recommended to also include Diversity training)**
- All managers should give 59 minute as small gesture for a job well done. **(This should be implemented and encouraged to boost employee morale)**

COOL - (Discuss with DOC HR, GC, etc.)

- The best candidates doesn't rise to the top through the COOL system
- COOL needs to be more user friendly
- COOL rates people on quantity of work, not quality of work
- Race and national origin, age (date of birth) information should be asked in COOL, information can be added after selection is made.